Class designed to help people identify mental illness

The El Dorado County Mental Health Division in South Lake Tahoe is hosting the Mental Health First Aid course.

MHFA is an interactive, internationally-recognized 12-hour course that helps the public identify, understand, and respond to signs of mental illnesses and substance use disorders. Participants should develop skills and knowledge to help connect individuals in crisis with appropriate professional, peer, and self-help care.

The free class is March 28 and March 29 from 9am-4pm at South Lake Tahoe branch library.

To register, email janet.stevens@edcgov.us or call (530) 573.7963.

Opinion: California should be more like Texas

By Chuck DeVore

One in five Americans calls California or Texas home. The two most populous states have a lot in common: a long coast, a sunny climate, a diverse population, plenty of oil in the ground, and Mexico to the south. Where they diverge is in their governance.

For six years ending in 2010, I represented almost 500,000 people in California's Legislature. I was vice chairman of the

Assembly Committee on Revenue and Taxation and served on the Budget Committee. I was even a lieutenant colonel in the state's National Guard. Before serving in Sacramento, I worked as an executive in California's aerospace industry.

I moved to Texas late last year, joining the 2 million Californians who have packed up for greener pastures in the past ten years, with Texas the most common destination.

In his State-of-the-State address this January, California Gov. Jerry Brown said, "Contrary to those declinists who sing of Texas and bemoan our woes, California is still the land of dreams. … It's the place where Apple … and countless other creative companies all began."

Fast forward to March: Apple announced it was building a $304 million campus in Austin with plans to hire 3,600 people to staff it, more than doubling its Texas workforce.

California may be dreaming, but Texas is working.

California's elected officials are particularly adept at dreaming up ways to spend other people's money. While the state struggles with interminable deficits caused by years of reckless spending, the argument in Sacramento isn't over how to reduce government; rather, it's over how much to raise taxes and on whom. Brown is pushing for a tax increase of $6.9 billion per year, to appear on November's ballot. California's powerful government-employee unions and Molly Munger, a wealthy civil-rights attorney (wealthy by dint of being the daughter of Warren Buffett's business partner) are offering two competing tax-hike plans. The silver lining may be that having three tax hikes on the ballot will turn voters off all of them.

Meanwhile, lawmakers in Texas are grappling with a fiscal question of an entirely different sort: whether or not to spend some of the $6 billion set aside in the state's rainy-day fund.

California’s government-employee unions routinely spend tens of millions of dollars at election time to maintain their hold on power. In Texas, the government unions are weak and don’t have collective bargaining, leaving trial attorneys as the main source of funding for Lone Star Democrats.

California’s habit of raising taxes to fund a burgeoning regulatory state isn’t without impact on its economy. Californians fork over about 10.6 percent of their income to state and local governments, above the U.S. average of 9.8 percent. Texans pay 7.9 percent. This affects the bottom line of both consumers and businesses.

With that money, Californians pay for more government. The number of non-education bureaucrats in California is close to the national average, at 252 per 10,000 people. Texas gets by with a bureaucracy 22 percent smaller: 196 per 10,000.

Of course, having more government employees means making more government rules. According to a 2009 study commissioned by the California legislature, state regulations cost almost $500 billion per year, or five times the state’s general-fund budget. These regulations ding the average small business for some $134,122 a year in compliance and opportunity costs.

While California has more bureaucrats, Texas has 17 percent more teachers, with 295 education employees per 10,000 people, compared to California’s 252.

The two states’ educational outcomes reflect this disparity. If we compare national test scores in math, science, and reading for the fourth and eighth grades among four basic ethnic and racial categories – all students, whites, Hispanics, and African-Americans – Texas beats California in every category, and by a substantial margin. In fact, Texas schools perform consistently above the national average across categories of age, race, and subject matter, while California schools perform well below the national average.

Apologists for the Golden State frequently point to Texas's flourishing oil and gas industry as the reason for its success. Texas does lead the nation in proven oil reserves, but California ranks third. The real difference isn't in geology but in public policy: Californians have decided to make it difficult to extract the oil under their feet.

Further, contrary to popular opinion, California's refineries routinely produce a greater value of product than do refineries in Texas, mainly because the special gasoline blends that California requires are more costly.

Another advantage that Texas enjoys over California is in its civil-justice system. In 2002, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce ranked Texas's legal system 46th in the nation, just behind California's, which was 45th. Texas went to work improving its lawsuit environment, enacting major medical-malpractice reforms in 2003. Texas's ranking consequently jumped 10 places in eight years, while California's dropped to 46th. In the last legislative session, Texas lawmakers passed a landmark loser-pays provision, which promises to further curtail frivolous lawsuits.

While California seeks more ways to tax success, it excels at subsidizing poverty. The percentage of households receiving public assistance in California was 3.7 percent in 2009, double Texas's rate of 1.8 percent. Almost one-third of all Americans on welfare reside in California.

With this in mind, it makes perfect sense that only 18 percent of the Democrats who control both houses of California's full-time legislature worked in business or medicine before being elected. The remainder drew paychecks from government, worked as community organizers, or were attorneys.

In Texas, with its part-time legislature, 75 percent of the Republicans who control both houses earn a living in business, farming, or medicine, with 19 percent being attorneys in

private practice. Texas Democrats are more than twice as likely as their California counterparts to claim private-sector experience outside the field of law.

That Texas's Legislature is run by makers and California's by takers is glaringly obvious from the two states' respective balance sheets.

Chuck DeVore served in the California Assembly from 2004 to 2010 and was a Republican candidate for the U.S. Senate in 2010. He is currently a visiting senior fellow in fiscal policy at the Texas Public Policy Foundation.

Meeting to discuss expanding broadband in Tahoe counties

To help communities get broadband service sooner, or to enhance existing service, the Sierra Economic Development Corporation needs to learn where service is available now and who still wants it.

With community feedback and guidance, SEDCorp says it can facilitate the earlier expansion of high-speed Internet service networks in Placer, Nevada, Sierra, El Dorado and eastern Alpine counties.

A meeting on this topic is planned for March 29 from 10am-2pm at the Auburn Veterans Memorial Hall, 100 East St., Auburn. Admission is free, and there will be a $2.00 charge for lunch.

RSVP to (530) 823.4703. Parking is limited, so carpooling is encouraged.

Business on the upswing at Red Hawk Casino

By Claudia Buck, Sacramento Bee

The company that manages Red Hawk Casino in Shingle Springs reported last week that its performance is improving, despite the bumpy economy.

“While the economy in Northern California continues to suffer, especially in the Sacramento market, the Red Hawk Casino showed improvements,” said Tim Cope, president and chief financial officer of Lakes Entertainment Inc., in a conference call to discuss the Minneapolis-based company’s year-end earnings report.

Without disclosing details on gaming revenues or customer visits, Cope said Red Hawk, owned by the Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians, has made operational improvements, boosted customer traffic and aggressively ramped up its marketing efforts in the last six to 10 months.

“It’s a positive year for Red Hawk, which is reassuring to see from the tribe’s perspective and ours,” Cope said.

Read the whole story

Feds move to seize S. Tahoe assets allegedly scammed from Auburn tribe

By Denny Walsh and Sam Stanton, Sacramento Bee

Federal agents are moving to seize 32 properties stretching from Sacramento to Hawaii to San Diego in an alleged kickback and money laundering scheme that they say drained $18 million from the coffers of the tribe that runs the Thunder Valley Casino in Lincoln.

Documents filed by the Internal Revenue Service in U.S. District Court in Sacramento late Tuesday allege that Sacramento developer Bart Volen and two others systematically siphoned off millions from the United Auburn Indian Community while they oversaw the construction of office buildings that now serve as the tribe's headquarters.

The IRS is seeking to seize the properties – including condominiums in Hawaii, San Diego and South Lake Tahoe – that the agency says were purchased with money taken from the tribe in an overbilling scheme.

No criminal charges have been filed in the case, which targets Volen, tribal administrator Greg Baker and former tribal worker Darrell Hinz.

None of the three men could immediately be reached today.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Feds have no business regulating news content

By Corydon B. Dunham

The FCC is poised to resurrect broad censorship rules that were revoked in 1987 because of their chilling effect on both free speech and the television press.

The proposed new Localism, Balance and Diversity Doctrine could eventually also affect news on the Internet. The FCC is reportedly planning to transfer the broadcast spectrum used by local television to the Internet to make it the nation's primary communications platform, and the agency has started to regulate the Internet.

In my book "Government Control of News: A Constitutional Challenge" I recount the evolution of government control of television news and the Fairness Doctrine. The book, the result of a study initiated at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars at the Smithsonian Institute, examines the history of the Fairness Doctrine – the rules by which the federal government regulated TV journalism. Similar rules had governed radio news since 1934 and were applied to TV in 1949 by the Federal Communications Commission.

TV was a powerful new medium and there were only a few broadcast stations in many communities. It was thought that this gave unusual power to station and network owners. The government justified the Fairness Doctrine as a way to ensure stations aired opposing viewpoints on issues.

But what was touted as an attempt to encourage robust discourse became a tool for censoring the news.

If a complaint was made about a view that had been broadcast, the FCC investigated. If it concluded that a view should be changed, it ordered that. If it concluded other views should be presented, or even related issues, it ordered that.

Failure to comply could result in no license renewal, renewal for a shorter period of time, or a "negative record" applied at renewal time.

In 1987, the FCC unanimously revoked the Fairness Doctrine, with court approval, after finding it had deterred news reporting on controversial issues, and had repeatedly been used to suppress viewpoints and help some officials pursue their own political objectives.

After two decades of failed attempts in Congress to revive the Fairness Doctrine, support began building anew. In 2008, the FCC released a new proposed body of rules for TV news – the Localism, Balance and Diversity Doctrine.

It has many of the same characteristics of the old Fairness Doctrine and can be expected to have similar results. News broadcast by television stations would have to meet government criteria for "localism" – local news production and coverage – as well as a regulatory balance and diversity of viewpoints. A three-vote majority of five FCC commissioners at a central government agency would make local news judgments and override those of thousands of independent, local TV reporters and editors.

It would also be enforced by having a local board at each station monitor programming, including news, and recommend against license renewal if the station did not comply with FCC policy.

In 2011, the FCC-sponsored Future of Media Study recommended the localism doctrine proceeding be ended. The present chief of the White House regulatory office has long recommended that the government regulate news to advance its political and

social objectives.

There is unprecedented silence from the FCC about its plans for television news in this country.

TV is not the only medium potentially affected.

At the end of 2010, the FCC decided to take over regulation of the Internet in this country. It will regulate its traffic and gain some power to review content.

The president, Congress and the FCC have also agreed to transfer the entire broadcast spectrum (currently used by TV stations) to the Internet over the next 10 years. If the localism doctrine is adopted, it could apply to the Internet and its participants as users of the FCC-controlled spectrum.

Requiring journalists to comply with a central government agency's policy on how to report the news means those journalists will no longer be free and independent.

As the Fairness Doctrine broadcast history shows, the threat of loss of license will deter station news coverage, particularly of controversy, and the public will lose news and information.

If the broadcast press is not free and independent of government, it cannot act as a watchdog for the public, which is its constitutional role.

Corydon B. Dunham is a Harvard Law School graduate. His "Government Control of News" study was expanded and developed for the Corydon B. Dunham Fellowship for the First Amendment at Harvard Law School and the Dunham Open Forum for First Amendment Values at Bowdoin College. Dunham was an executive at NBC from 1965 to 1990. He oversaw legal and government matters and Broadcast Standards.

Losing track when reading e-books

By Maia Szalavitz, Time

I received a Kindle for my birthday, and enjoying “light reading,” in addition to the dense science I read for work, I immediately loaded it with mysteries by my favorite authors. But I soon found that I had difficulty recalling the names of characters from chapter to chapter. At first, I attributed the lapses to a scary reality of getting older – but then I discovered that I didn’t have this problem when I read paperbacks.

When I discussed my quirky recall with friends and colleagues, I found out I wasn’t the only one who suffered from “e-book moments.” Online, I discovered that Google’s Larry Page himself had concerns about research showing that on-screen reading is measurably slower than reading on paper.

This seems like a particularly troubling trend for academia, where digital books are slowly overtaking the heavy tomes I used to lug around. On many levels, e-books seem like better alternatives to textbooks – they can be easily updated and many formats allow readers to interact with the material more, with quizzes, video, audio and other multimedia to reinforce lessons. But some studies suggest that there may be significant advantages in printed books if your goal is to remember what you read long-term.

Reno air races ready to soar again

By Sam Stanton, Sacramento Bee

Despite the deaths of 11 people, federal investigations and lawsuits seeking millions of dollars, organizers of the Reno air races are moving ahead with plans to hold the event again in September.

Emails announcing ticket sales for the 49th annual National Championship Air Races went out Tuesday, touting a “fun-filled racing experience.”

The announcement also promised a “world class memorial and tribute” for the 10 spectators who were killed, the 74 who were injured and the pilot who died when his World War II-era fighter plane slammed into two rows of box seats last year and left a hole 3 feet deep.

But, there is no guarantee that the races will go on as scheduled. Federal approval is still pending and legal challenges contend that strict new safety rules are needed before the races can be held.

“What I know at this point is that if they don’t make any modifications, they’re reckless,” said Anthony Buzbee, a Houston attorney who has filed a $25 million lawsuit on behalf of the family of Craig Salerno, a Texas man killed in last year’s accident.

Read the whole story

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



• The Family Resource Center in South Lake Tahoe has canned food available for anyone who needs some assistance. The center at 3501 Spruce Ave, Ste. B is open Monday-Friday from 8:30am-5pm.

• Tahoe Best Friends' Puppy Kindergarten Class is every Thursday from 7-8pm. Call (530) 542.2336 to reserve a spot in the nine-week series.

• Tahoe Truckee Community Foundation has given an $8,000 grant to the Mountain Area Preservation Foundation for its project Connecting the Landscape – Martis Valley to Mount Rose.

• Mustang Ranch brothel owner Lance Gilman is running for Storey County commissioner.

• Find out what the Tahoe Pipe Club has to say about the March 14 runoff in the basin by watching this video.

Pacing yourself on your next ski trip

By Jess Higgins Kelley, MNT, SKI magazine



Don't overdo on your ski vacation.

Sometimes, the anticipation surrounding a ski trip creates a type of pressure that detonates the first night of vacation. Here’s what happens: arrival in a ski town, off the plane and direct to the slope side hotel. This is immediately followed by an indecent amount of cocktailing and pizza eating with old pals in effort to blow off steam accumulated by wrapping up work projects needed to get away. The next morning – well, ouch. But you drag yourself out of bed, get an extra shot in your coffee, hit the slopes with half-drunk vigor, and chase it all with a couple beers. The following morning, with sore muscles, slight nausea, and a black diamond headache, you successfully talk yourself out of skiing – it’s a little cold and icy anyway. Vacation is ruined, you feel sick the rest of the week.

The good news is this scenario doesn’t have to be reality. Let’s look at some easy strategies you can implement in order to ensure your next ski trip is spent actually skiing, and not throwing up and watching TV in a dark hotel room.

Read the whole story